Koviloor Acadamy

THE "A.L." No. 213.

BRIGHT STORY READERS.

Grade I.

Imso 466

THE CHELSEA DANCERS,

AND

THE MAGIC BALLOONS.

By VIOLET KING.

Printed in England.

362

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THE "A.L." BRIGHT STORY READERS.

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THE CHELSEA DANCERS.

"I HAVE promised never, never to touch you —but I want to," said the child to the old Chelsea china figure in the cabinet. "Tell me, why would you break if I touched you? I wanted to see you dance; they say you used to dance beautifully."

But the china dancer was silent.

"Ah, well!" went on the child, "I've promised." And with a sigh she turned away.

She went to bed, but not to sleep, for the china ornament filled her head; and when all the house was silent, she forgot her promise and crept silently down the stairs into the empty drawing-room. She knew her mother and father were going to a dance. "So *they* will be out of the way," she thought.

It was all in darkness, but the child drew the curtains, and the room was flooded with moonlight. With trembling fingers she opened the door of the china-cabinet, and looked longingly at the dancer inside. There was nothing in all the world she wanted more than to touch the thing she had been forbidden to touch.

"You wouldn't break, if I took you in my

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arms just for one moment, would you?" she whispered, with a pleading look.

But there was no answer. So *very* slowly her hand went out towards the china ornament, and softly touched the little scarlet and yellow slippers, then drew back, half expecting her touch would bring the ornament to the floor with a crash.

Still nothing happened. So she ventured a little farther, and, with her warm, soft fingers she stroked the little china head. Then wider and wider her round eyes grew, as she hastily took the figure in her two small hands and hurriedly kissed it. With a big, deep sigh she placed it back on the shelf, and, without even waiting to close the door of the cabinet, she flew upstairs to bed.

And somehow or other, for the first time for years, the little china dancer felt warm, it was the warmth of the child's kiss. Then slowly she came to life. First her hands stretched out, then her tiny feet moved, and she turned her head from side to side.

Years ago she had had a partner, and they had always danced the minuet together; but he had gone—where, she did not know. Not until now had she been sure that he was not at the back of the cabinet. But *now* she *was* sure; for she had looked at all the china figures there, and he was not among them.

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Quickly she jumped to the floor; and, as her feet touched the carpet, she felt just the same as she had felt years before, when the sculptor had modelled her in clay before they had made a china ornament of her. So, naturally, she bowed and commenced to dance; but, finding it difficult without music or a partner, she stood still and wondered if she *could* find her partner.

Looking at the long French window, she saw that it was open; so, without a moment's hesitation, she slipped through and out on to the lawn beyond.

At first she felt strange at being out there alone; nevertheless, she hurried across the soft grass.

Suddenly she stopped, for she fancied she heard music in the distance, and her small feet unconsciously beat time. Quickening her steps in the direction of the sound—which came from a large house on the opposite side of the road—she soon came within sight of the twinkling lights; and the soft notes of an orchestra could now plainly be heard.

"Oh!" she thought, "they are having a dance." But her face clouded, for now that *she* was free to dance, her partner was missing. "I *must* find him and dance once more," she whispered, as nearer and nearer she crept to the music.

To her delight she saw an open door, and

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she soon found herself walking up some wide stairs. The music and the patter of the dancers' feet led her on, and in a few moments she was in a minstrels' gallery overlooking the hall where the dancers were. The gallery was only dimly lighted, and to her great relief she saw a large plant, behind which she could hide and still see the dancers below.

Oh! how good the music was! And how happy the dancers looked! Her feet tingled, and *would* tap the floor, keeping time with the music. All she wanted was her partner; but *where* was he?

"Just to dance once more!" she whispered with longing.

So intent was she on watching the dancers below, that she did not know two old gentlemen were sitting near to her.

"I could go down there and dance with them, for they would never know that I was supposed to be china, but I haven't a partner," she sighed.

Suddenly she noticed the two old gentlemen!

"It is a long time since *I* was at a fancy-dress ball," one of them was saying.

"And a long time since we had one," replied the other, who was the host. "Dear me!" he went on, "who is that lady sitting over there?" And he nodded in the direction of the Chelsea dancer.

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"Don't know," replied the other.

"Strange! But she must have copied the dress of the Chelsea china ornaments—you know, the Chelsea dancers. I wonder where she saw them, for I have the man figure, and I want his partner. They are supposed to be the "minuet dancers." *She* must have seen the real china, or she could not have copied their dress so accurately. Now, I wonder where the other figure is."

The dancer's heart stood still, and she held the sides of her chair.

"Are they speaking of my lost partner?" she wondered. And she listened again eagerly.

"I must ask my wife who she is, and where she came from. Perhaps she can tell us where the other ornament is. They are valuable," went on the host. "Come and see the Chelsea china figure I have—the partner."

And the two old gentlemen moved away.

"It *must* be he," she whispered, and moved slowly in the same direction as the old gentlemen.

They went towards the drawing-room, and she followed, but not so close that they could see her. And when they were in the room, she slipped behind the long window curtains.

She trembled so much, that it was strange they did not see the curtains moving, but they were not looking that way; they were going towards the china cabinet.

"Here he is," said the host, as he opened

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the glass door. "You see it is the gentleman's dress of the same period."

The dancer behind the curtains could not resist peeping from her hiding-place, when she heard these words. And, to her great joy, it *was* her own partner they were looking at.

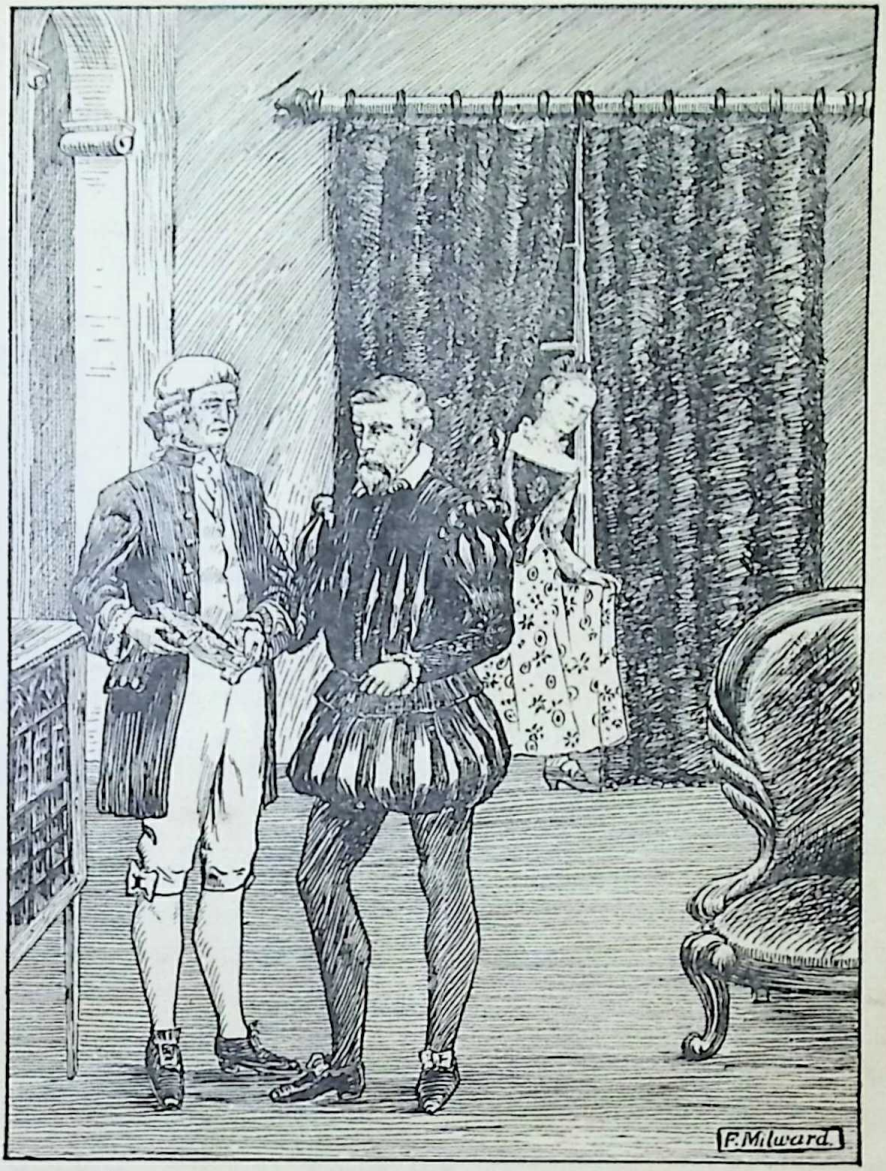
"I want the pair," said the host, as he shut the door with a click, and together they left the room to find the lady in the gallery dressed like Chelsea china.

Quickly the Chelsea dancer left her hiding-place, and ran to the cabinet.

"Yes, it is he," she whispered joyfully.

But he was only a china figure and did not recognize her. Then, just as the child had touched her, she touched the slippers of the dancer in the cabinet. Still he did not move; so with trembling hands she took him up and kissed him, as the child had kissed her. Still he did not come to life. So, with fear and disappointment in her heart, she cried; then her tears brought the ornament to life, and he stood beside her.

Neither spoke, but she went to the door which led into the hall, and opened it so that he could hear the music. By some strange chance, the orchestra began to play a minuet. Their eyes sparkled; and they bowed to each other. At last their time had come, and the longing of years was fulfilled. Their feet tingled for joy!



"She could not resist peeping from her hiding-place, when she heard these words."—*Page* 6.

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Slowly and gracefully they commenced their minuet, and as they entered the hall where the other dancers were, somehow they all drifted to the side, and left the centre space down the room for the Chelsea dancers to dance alone. Everybody else stopped dancing, leaving the minuet dancers to continue their dance.

It was like a scene in a picture, and there was not a sound save the orchestra, and the tiny clink of the Chelsea dancers' feet as they lightly touched the floor. Everybody was in fancy dress; and the lights were very dim.

"When I was young——," the host was saying. "Look!" he went on, clutching his friend's arm. "Surely that is the lady who sat up here alone; but she has now found her partner. They are exactly like the Chelsea china figures. How strange! No one else is dancing. There is something uncanny about it all!

"Am I dreaming?" he said, rubbing his eyes. "I suppose I am getting old, for I was just going to tell you that I used to dance the minuet when I was young."

"Yes," replied his friend, "we must be getting old. But *I* never danced like that. How wonderfully they dance! How like a picture they look."

And never had such grace been seen in that hall. It put all the rest of the company to shame, and they watched breathlessly.

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Then the music ceased, and the two dancers faced each other and bowed solemnly. What they had lived for was now over. And, to the crowd, they appeared to vanish; but really, as the music ceased, they went behind a large plant, for they were returning to their usual size.

"Where have they gone?" whispered the host. But no one answered.

The Chelsea dancers seemed to have melted out of sight.

As there was a feeling of strangeness around, no one felt like dancing again; and one by one the guests disappeared, and the great hall was empty, save for the two little china figures, which hid behind the plant for fear of being broken.

But there they stayed until the hostess came to see if all was right; and as she looked round, her eyes alighted on the two figures.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "However did those ornaments get there? And only one belongs to me! I cannot understand it." And she took them up in her arms very carefully, as her husband came into the hall.

"Here, my dear," he said, without looking up, "your friend across the way leaves a note saying she wishes us to accept the partner to our Chelsea china dancer. Someone told her to-night that we wanted the other figure to

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make the pair, so here we are——." Then he stopped, for he had seen the two figures in his wife's arms.

"But——b—," he stammered.

"Oh! I don't know how they came to be here, or who brought them, but here they are," went on his wife. (But you and I know, and it really doesn't matter. They *were* there, and that is all that matters.)

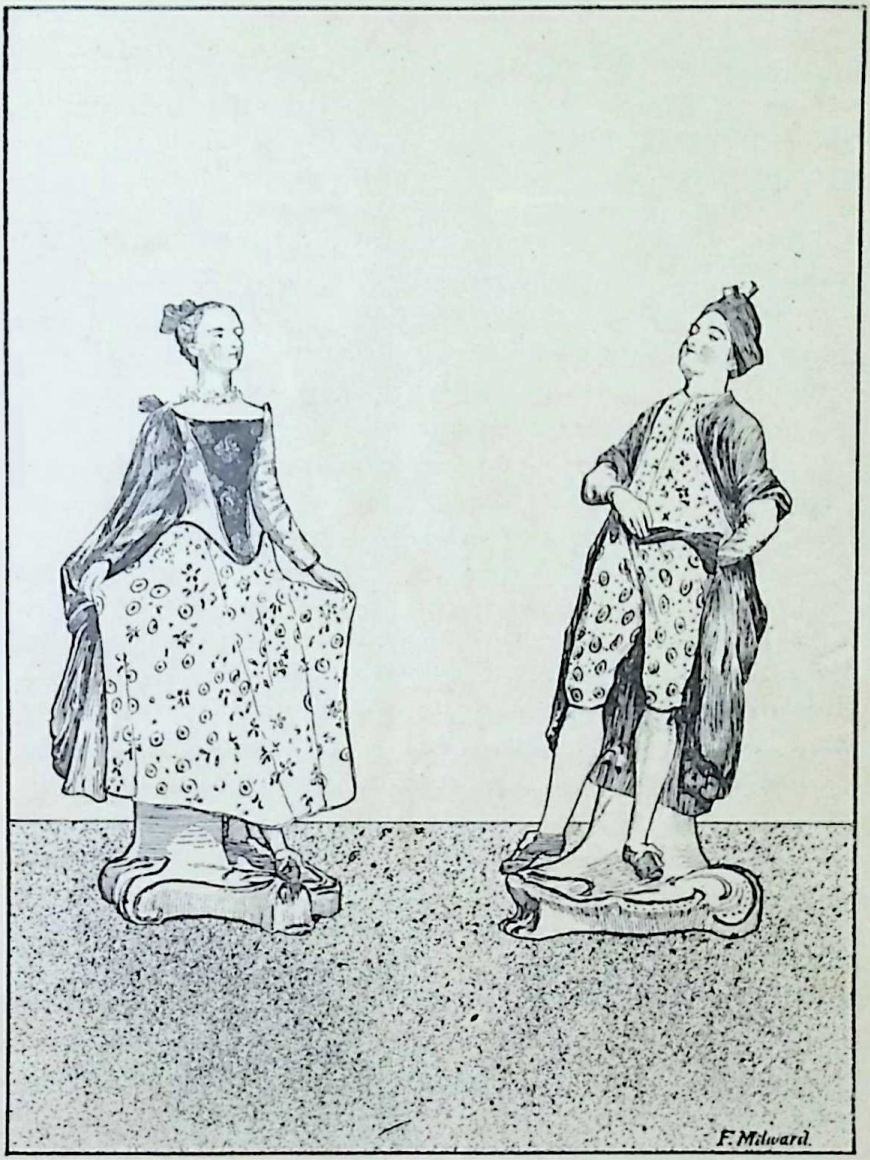
"I must be old," muttered the old gentleman, passing his hand across his eyes. "Very old!"

"Nonsense!" replied his matter-of-fact wife. "But it *is* kind of her to give us this valuable figure."

"We had better put them back in the cabinet again, before something happens to them," said the old gentleman, giving them a strange look.

His wife handed him the female figure to carry, while she carried the partner; and as they walked towards the drawing-room, the old gentleman *thought* it was the *real* dancer's eyes that met his—the dancer who had sat in the gallery. But he did not say anything to his wife about all this. You see, he put it down to his old age. For, when one gets very old, one's eyes play strange tricks. Besides, had not his wife said it was "Nonsense"? And perhaps she was right!

Side by side they were placed on the shelf of the china cabinet; and again the old gentle-



The Chelsea Dancers.

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man thought he saw a smile of satisfaction cross the lady dancer's face, as he placed her beside her partner. But, again, it may only have been his fancy!

The glass door was shut with a click which echoed down the great hall where the two dancers had held them all spellbound, and right up to the gallery, where one of them had sat alone, but it was only an echo and did not matter. The great thing which *did* matter was, they were all happy—especially the two Chelsea china dancers.

THE MAGIC BALLOONS.

SHE always sat just outside the Park Gates at Knightsbridge, in the West End of London—the old woman who sold the balloons. Her name was really Mrs. Bunsey, but all the children called her Bunny. She was short and very fat, and always wore a little black bonnet, much too small for her head. But the children wouldn't have known her in anything else.

Jack and Jill used to stop and talk to her every day, as they passed into the Park, and used to tease her about her bonnet always being crooked.

"Isn't it windy to-day, Bunny?" said Jill, as they stopped to have their usual chat.

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"Yes," replied Bunny, "and I do believe I should go up with these balloons, if I were not so heavy. It's a terrible wind!"

"Wouldn't it be fun to go up into the sky like that? I say, Bunny, do you believe in magic now?" Jack asked.

"No, of course not," said Bunny indignantly.

"Well, *we* do," said Jill.

She had no sooner said the words than, strange to tell, Bunny seemed to be growing taller. Her feet were not even touching the pavement.

"Hang on to the strings of the balloons—both of you—quickly," she cried, thinking their weight would bring her down again.

Jack sprang up until he reached the strings, which were firmly grasped by Bunny. The balloons were flying high in the air above her head. Jill jumped too, and soon the three of them were holding on for all they were worth.

"We're off," shouted Jack. "What fun!"

"It's magic," said Jill, and her eyes shone with excitement.

It all happened so quickly that nobody seemed to notice them, as they left the earth.

"Fun indeed!" said Bunny, with a very red face and her bonnet all on one side. "*I* don't call it fun. Mind you both hold tight."

Jack and Jill laughed, for they were enjoying it, and Bunny looked *so* funny.

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Jack soon found that by pulling the strings they could guide themselves easily. So they went lower, until they were in a line with the sun.

"Where are we?" asked Bunny.

"We're going into the setting sun."

"My goodness! We shall all be scorched up to nothing, and I'm sure the balloons will go off pop."

"No, they won't," said Jack, who really wasn't sure they would not; but he longed for some sort of real adventure, and didn't much care what happened to the balloons.

"Don't be silly, Bunny," Jill said. "It's nothing to worry about. It is only the setting sun, and not a bit hot, you know. Besides these must be magic balloons, or they wouldn't have brought us up here. Nothing magic ever breaks, so they are safe enough."

"Magic or no magic——" began Bunny.

"Please don't grumble; it spoils everything," exclaimed Jack. "Put your bonnet straight, and try to look a little cheerful, Bunny, for we are nearly there."

"Put my bonnet straight!" she almost shouted. "What do you think would happen to me, if I let go my strings to put my bonnet straight?"

"Do it with one hand, and hold on with the other," Jill suggested. "See! It is quite safe to let go one hand." And she let one of her hands hang down freely.

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"I wouldn't do it for all the world," Bunny muttered. And she shivered at the very thought, leaving her bonnet over her ear. Presently they stopped, and found their feet were touching something. Jack and Jill let go, but Bunny still held firmly on to her strings.

"It's all right now we're standing. You can rest safely now, Bunny," the children told her.

But Bunny didn't trust anybody, and *she* didn't believe in magic; so she still held on tightly.

Jack took his sister's hand and walked a few steps forward; he wanted to explore.

"Come on, Bunny," they said. And she followed, but very cautiously, flying her bright-coloured balloons over her head as she went, and looking round very anxiously—for what, she did not know.

"We're inside the sun, I suppose," she said, wondering why she didn't feel any hotter.

"Oh, look!" the children cried in one breath.

There, quite close beside them was a little castle of beautiful gold, with tiny golden gates and doors, all lighted up by the setting sun. But they couldn't see any people about.

"I should love to go inside," said Jill eagerly.

"I shouldn't," said Bunny, shaking her head and eyeing the castle with suspicion.

"Nonsense! We must all go inside and see

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what's there," Jack said, as he pushed open the little gold gate, and walked up the path leading to the door.

"Come on, Bunny," said Jill, half dragging the unwilling Bunny.

But they found some difficulty with the balloons, for they *would* catch against everything. After a while, they pushed open the door, and Jack went inside.

"You'll have to leave the balloons outside," whispered Jill to Bunny. But she only shook her head.

"I'll stay outside here, until you both come back," she said hoarsely, and fixed herself against the golden door-post, looking just as though she had always stood there, selling her balloons.

"Well, put your bonnet straight. You don't look very respectable like that, Bunny. Supposing anybody saw you."

Bunny immediately straightened her black bonnet. "There! Is that right?" she asked.

"Yes, that's better." And Jill disappeared inside after Jack, who was waiting for her. Very cautiously they stepped across what appeared to be a hall paved with gold, until they reached another little door. There wasn't a sound, but what they saw nearly took away their breath.

It was a huge room with hundreds of windows, and dozens of little people were running about. They were rushing backwards

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"'I'll stay outside here, until you both come back,' she said hoarsely."—*Page* 16.

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and forwards from the centre of the room to the various windows, with great dazzling lights in their hands.

"Shall *we* speak first?" whispered Jill.

"I don't know which is the right thing to do here. Let's wait and see what happens."

"You needn't wait for anything in Sunshine Land," said a very soft voice behind them. "You can come to the window and watch us at work."

The children ran to the nearest window, eager to see what was happening. Out of each window the fairies sent huge rays of rich red sunlight in long stretches, until they reached the earth.

"Oh, I see! You are sending the sunlight down to earth to shine on people," Jill remarked, feeling very excited, and wishing they would let her do it, too. She had no sooner wished than a little sun fairy gave her a huge red beam and pointed towards the open window.

"Just drop it through," he said. "Keep on holding it, until you've got the place you want to make it shine on; then loose it." And, even as he spoke, he rushed away to another window to drop his own beam.

"I think I'll send one down to the slums—right into the tiny, black courtyards in the East End," Jill said. And as she spoke, her beam slipped out of her hand with a little quiver, but she couldn't see where it had gone.

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"Come here and look!" called out the fairy that had first spoken to them. They immediately rushed to his window, and saw a ray of red sunlight shining down among dirty chimney-pots, which they knew must be in the East End of London.

"Where's Bunny?" asked the fairy.

Jack and Jill looked at each other, and wondered how he knew about Bunny.

"We'll go and fetch her," they said, and rushed out to find the troubled old balloon woman.

"Why! Bunny, you're shaking like a leaf," Jill said with a laugh.

"Leaf, indeed!" she replied indignantly.

"Well, come on inside. It's ever so much more exciting in there than standing out here. They are all busy sending sunset rays down to earth," Jill went on, tugging at her arm.

"I think I'll have to leave these balloons here, for I don't know how I'm ever to get back to earth without them," she said, firmly tying the strings through the golden bars of the gate.

"Don't bother about getting to earth again. I'm sure the fairies will see to that for us," Jack said.

They nearly pulled her inside the room, where she stood still, and blinked so much that the children roared with laughter at the funny face she was making.

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"I wish I'd brought my glasses," at last she stammered. "But I should think one would want black ones up here. So this is how the sunset is managed, is it?" By this time she had got used to the glare and was peering around at the strange little sun fairies.

"Let Bunny send down a ray, please," Jill asked one of the fairies. But the fairies shook their heads, as they heard this.

"She doesn't believe in fairies, so it's no good. One *has* to believe in magic to do it."

"Believe in magic!" Bunny retorted. "No, indeed!" And she was delighted not to have to touch the shadowy sunbeams. But the children whispered and told her not to say anything like that, while they were in this strange land, in case anything happened to them all. And Bunny promised.

They watched breathlessly, as, one after another the rays disappeared through the various windows, until there were only a few left. The room then became a little less glaring.

"It's getting dark," Bunny said hoarsely, looking round for means of escape.

"Yes, the sun is setting," said a little fairy sadly. "We are always sorry to set."

"Dear me! Dear me!" sighed Bunny, as if she quite felt the same. "But what's going to happen to *us*, when you set?"

"Oh, you will all go on to the moon, you

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know," the fairy answered. "It's full moon to-night; so there's sure to be some fun going on, although we shan't see it. We shall all be asleep."

Darker and darker the room grew, but so gradually that they scarcely realized it until Bunny took Jack and Jill by their hands and said, "Quick! Let us run for the balloons, before they disappear."

They hadn't a moment to lose; for, just as their feet were going through the door, the room quivered and quietly sank out of sight, leaving the three of them outside the door where they had left the balloons. These were flying about, just as if they were waiting to be bought at the Park gates, instead of in the Land of the Setting Sun.

"That's a bit of luck," Bunny said, putting her head on one side until her bonnet was all crooked again. "Now, I propose we hold the strings as tightly as we can, in case we vanish too," she said, being the first one to do so. The children laughed, but did as they were told.

"Isn't it exciting? I wonder what's going to happen next?" Jill said.

"We half know; for the fairy said we should pass on to the moon," Jack replied. "Look!" he went on, "there's the moon down below us. See, it is rising up higher and higher. It will soon be level with us, I'm sure."

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"Hold tight!" shouted Bunny. "I'm sure we're going now."

They all grasped the strings tighter, as they felt their feet rising off the sunset, and found they were following the big moon as he sailed up into the sky.

"Dear me! Dear me!" sighed Bunny. "I have an idea that my bonnet's all on one side."

"Yes, it is. But hush! My feet are touching the moon," said Jill, scarcely above a whisper.

"So are mine."

"And mine."

They all rubbed their eyes, for it was bright moonlight. Jack and Jill told Bunny to put her balloons down and rest; but she was fearfully nervous, and only held them tighter.

"You are *so* silly, Bunny. Why! you should be a sport, and loose when we loose," said Jack.

"It's all very well," replied Bunny. "I'm not so young as you are. Besides, I don't trust moons and things up here." And she laughed nervously.

The children simply roared with laughter at this remark.

"What are you laughing at?" asked a voice behind them. And they looked round to see the big moon smiling at them, and even his eyes twinkled when he saw Bunny's bonnet.

She saw him look, so she hastily tied her

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balloons to her apron strings, and immediately put her bonnet straight. The moon still laughed.

"I suppose I do look funny," she said, speaking as if she felt hurt. "But I've seen others quite as funny. But so would you, if you had floated up here, hanging on to the strings of balloons with two children holding on too. Why! I've nearly died of fright."

"Not quite so bad as that, Bunny," said the children laughing.

"Oh, well! Pretty near it."

"Where's that?" asked the moon.

"Now, don't *you* try to be funny," Bunny replied crossly.

"We can't help being funny at full-moon time," the moon said. "You'll be funny presently."

"Where's presently?" Bunny asked, laughing.

"There you are," said the moon. "I told you so. Now you *are* funny too. What silly things can you do?"

Bunny put her head on one side and began to think. This, of course, made the children scream with laughter, because they felt so sure she couldn't do one silly thing. And it made her bonnet all crooked again.

"I should think I could bounce. You see, I'm so fat and round. Yes, I'm almost sure I can bounce. Try me!" she exclaimed, passing the balloons on to Jack to hold.

The moon immediately pressed Bunny's

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head down low; and, as he lifted his hand, she bounced up in the air just like a big ball.

She really looked so funny that the children laughed until they nearly cried; and the moon joined in the fun.

"You never told us you could bounce, Bunny," they said.

"I can only do it at full-moon time," she explained, with a very red face. Then taking her balloons firmly in her hands, she motioned the children to take the strings too.

"Come along," she said. "This is no place for us, I'm sure. It's all moonshine. I am going back to earth again to look after my children."

"We didn't know you had any children," said Jill. "Tell us about them, Bunny."

"There's one girl fourteen, and one seven. What's more, they oughtn't to be left down there when it is dark, as I suppose it is on earth. I wish I knew what they were doing now." And she looked so worried that they felt quite sorry for her; even the moon forgot to be silly and became quite serious. In fact, he was really very sorry for her!

"I'll throw a light down on them," he said, "and you can see for yourself what they are doing."

Instantly there appeared a huge moonbeam, which he threw down to earth, just as they had thrown the sunbeams down from the sunset.

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"Oh, look! That's my house," cried Bunny, as she eagerly watched the beam playing around a dark-looking house on earth. The moonbeam shone through a window in Bunny's house, and there were the children fast asleep in bed.

"Well! now you are satisfied," said the moon. "You see they are quite safe."

"Yes, thank you," Bunny said. "But, all the same, I'll be very glad to get back again."

"Oh! wait a bit," pleaded the children, "let's finish our adventure."

"It can be finished now." And Bunny tossed her head up, as if she quite meant it.

"No, be a sport, Bunny," said Jack. "We'll go on a little further and get home with the rising sun."

The moon had stopped laughing and was looking very tired.

"Perhaps we had better go; but don't go off in such a hurry as that, Bunny. The moon has been very kind and amusing, so shake hands properly," said Jack, as he went up to the moon to shake his hand.

"I'd rather not shake hands with magic people," said Bunny, looking very suspicious, and holding her balloons tighter.

"Oh, well, *we* believe in magic things, Mr. Moon," said Jill, shaking his hand prettily.

"Ready? Then go," Jack said. And they both held the strings, and away they sailed right

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out into the sky with all the stars and clouds around them. Bunny's bonnet blew round and round her head, but she didn't attempt to put it straight. She would not let go her string for "all the world," she said, as they floated along.

"Steer towards the big star over there," whispered Jill. They had to whisper, because Bunny was so nervous and anxious to go down to earth, and *they* didn't want to go until they were sure there was nothing more to be seen up in the sky.

"Look out!" shouted Bunny. "We shall knock up against that star over there."

Even as she spoke, they were on the very edge of a big star which seemed to have huge spikes of gold sticking out all round it, and on one of these they landed.

"Goodness! Where are we?" asked Bunny. "It's taken away my breath."

"We're on the edge of a star," Jack told her, looking round. "Keep close beside me, Jill, until we know where we are."

But Jill didn't need telling; she clung very closely to the other two *and* to the balloon strings, for there was something very strange about the star, something quite different from the sunset and the moonland.

There wasn't anybody to be seen, whichever way they looked.

"I think it's about time our adventure

"'Steer towards the big star over there,' whispered Jill."—*Page* 26.

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finished," Bunny said. "Just hold on to these balloons, for I feel something moving under my feet."

"Nonsense!" the children replied. They always *did* laugh at Bunny's fears.

"It's quite right this time," she said, with a knowing shake of her head.

Scarcely had she uttered the words when something moved under all their feet. They clung desperately to the strings, and were ready at any moment to go into the air again. Still there was nobody to be seen on the star; so they waited, scarcely daring to breathe.

"We're going, I believe," whispered Bunny in her very hoarsest voice.

"Where?" both cried.

There was no one to answer, for the star under them had shot out into the sky, leaving them hanging on to the balloon strings. "Goodness! That was like an earthquake," they said.

"A starquake, I should say. But I've had enough of your moonshine adventures up here," muttered Bunny, as they sailed along.

"Oh, I see what happened," called Jack, looking round. "It was a shooting star we were on. We should not have landed on that one. How silly of us! But then, we didn't know it was going to shoot."

Then they laughed, as they watched the star shooting all across the sky in front of them.

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"Come along! Let's all go back to earth," said Bunny, impatiently.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" Jack asked. "We are having a lovely time up here, and are quite safe. Why! even you float about as though you were a bubble; and, you know, Bunny, you are pretty big really—and heavy."

"But if Bunny is really anxious to get back to her own children," Jill said, "let us try to guide the balloons down to earth again."

"Yes, perhaps we had better, although I am sorry to rush back like this, for we may never have the chance to come up here again."

"I hope *not*," muttered Bunny under her breath.

So they pulled the strings, and softly dropped a little lower down towards earth.

But how long they were drifting about the sky they never knew. It seemed hours to them, for they were going so very slowly that sometimes they wondered if they were moving at all. The stars had disappeared, and it was dark again. The moon had quite vanished, and although they were safe, they had a shock on discovering that they were not moving one inch lower.

"Something has gone wrong," cried Bunny. "We are in the same place, and not moving at all. Why! we shall soon have daylight. Maybe we'll have to stay here for ever."

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"Oh, we shall be all right. This is only part of the fun," remarked Jack, with a laugh in which Jill joined.

Bunny was thoroughly scared by this time, so she didn't speak. She didn't even listen to the children, as they chatted away. But, after a time, even they were silent. And across the sky appeared a thin red streak.

"The dawn!" Jill whispered.

"Why, of course. I expect that's what we have had to wait for," said Jack. "Everything has to be still in the sky just before the dawn, I know. Now we shall be all right, Bunny."

"Yes," she answered, and actually smiled. "I suppose I've been upsetting myself for nothing. But, you see, I never *did* believe in magic, as I've told you before."

Then, very gradually, they began to move again. But, try as hard as they could, the children couldn't guide themselves any nearer the earth. They simply drifted about at the same height all the time.

"It's lovely," cried Jack. "We have to wait for something else, I suppose."

Neither of them guessed what they had to wait for. And gradually the sky changed colour, and each could see the other's face in the pale light of dawn.

"Look! The sun is rising," Jill cried. "See, we are moving towards it." It was quite true,

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they were floating towards the rising sun, as it rose higher and higher to meet them.

Nearer and nearer they went until they met it, and their feet were resting on the edge of it; then they were right inside it.

"How wonderful!" Jack exclaimed, as they stood still, looking round.

"Good morning!" said the sun. "We knew you would see us again. We are going to send you down to earth, when you're ready; on a sunbeam, of course."

"We *are* ready," said Bunny, as she straightened her bonnet and actually laughed. "But I'd like to see the sunbeam that could carry *me*."

"It is quite simple," replied the sun. "Here is the beam all ready, I see." And, as he spoke, he pushed open a big window like the one they had seen the setting sun use to send the rays down the evening before; only everything was of pale gold now, instead of rich red gold. And the little rising-sun fairies began to appear, and to throw out the beams. Then they all went to have a good look at the beam that was to take them back to earth.

"Are you all ready?" asked the sun. The children nodded and clasped hands. Bunny grasped her balloons with one hand, and Jill with the other; then she nodded too.

"Away!" the sun cried; and they found themselves softly sliding down the pale golden

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beam. They were going so very swiftly that it was a sheer joy-ride. Nobody spoke; but all their faces were lighted up with sunshine.

At last they stopped, and the sunbeam suddenly vanished; yet there was a little sunshine, but very pale.

"Where are we? Oh, I'm so hungry!" Bunny cried.

"So am I," the children said together. "We never felt hungry until now, though."

"Why!" Bunny said gleefully, "we are in the Park." And she threw up her balloons just as if they were waiting to be sold; then she straightened her bonnet.

"So we are. These are the Park Gates," said Jack. "Now do you believe in magic, Bunny?"

Bunny looked scared, and quickly pulled down the balloons. "Well, perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't," she said. "But I'm going home; and what's more, I'm never going to sell balloons again. I think lavender is safer." And, throwing a kiss to each of the children, she hurried off home.

"Just as if lavender isn't magic too, sometimes," Jill said, as she and Jack ran home to breakfast.

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